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NEWS

State Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven joins crowded bid to succeed retiring Sen. Jehlen

A Somerville progressive launched a campaign for the Second Middlesex seat.

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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State Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven announced she is running for the Second Middlesex Senate seat be by retiring Sen. Pat Jehlen. COURTESY PHOTO/STATE REP. ERIKA UYTERHOEVEN

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State Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven announced she is running for the Second Middlesex Senate seat being vacated by retiring Sen. Pat Jehlen, pledging to press on affordability, immigrant protections and government transparency in the chamber where Jehlen built a two-decade progressive record.

Uyterhoeven, who is serving her third term representing Somerville in the State House, made the announcement at the Medford/Tufts Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) station, drawing dozens of supporters and community members.

The Second Middlesex District spans Somerville, Medford, Cambridge and Winchester.

Uyterhoeven is the fifth candidate to enter the contest, and the Democratic primary is Sept. 1, 2026. The race also includes state Rep. Christine Barber, Winchester School Committee member Tom Hopcroft, Cambridge Vice Mayor Burhan Azeem and Somerville City Councilor Matt McLaughlin.

“We have delivered big wins by bringing our communities together,” Uyterhoeven said at the event. “Doubling funding for local affordable housing by millions of dollars a year, taxing millionaires to fix the MBTA and fund our public schools. Now we’re going to open every door on Beacon Hill and build a Massachusetts where everyone truly belongs.”

Her campaign drew early endorsements from the Massachusetts Teachers Association, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2222, Cambridge City Councilor Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler and Somerville City Councilors JT Scott and Jon Link.

Uyterhoeven framed her six-year tenure in the House as evidence that she can win fights others will not take. She pointed to her role in ma

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committee votes publicly available — a move she described in an interview as once considered the third rail of the Legislature.

That transparency measure, according to her campaign, recently allowed advocates to block an energy bill she characterized as written by corporate polluters that would have raised utility bills and weakened the state's climate goals.

Her scrutiny of the Healey administration dominated the weeks leading up to her campaign launch. Two weeks before her announcement, Uyterhoeven published an investigation into Gov. Maura Healey's contract to deploy OpenAI's ChatGPT to up to 40,000 state employees.

According to her campaign, the deal was recommended by an artificial intelligence task force that included executives from Microsoft, Amazon and Fidelity — companies with existing financial ties to OpenAI. Within 24 hours of publication, seven senior administration officials called a meeting with her.

"They didn't call to release the documents," she said. "They called to explain."

Uyterhoeven connected the AI fight directly to immigrant safety. Her campaign cited concerns that OpenAI appears in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's AI inventory and that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has nearly doubled its AI use cases in six months. She said ICE is currently purchasing geolocation data to locate people and using AI to mine Medicaid records to track undocumented immigrants.

She cited Rümeysa Öztürk, a Somerville resident she said was detained by masked federal agents, and described constituents delaying prenatal care out of fear that accessing health benefits could expose their fami
enforcement.

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"People deserve to know what technology is being used on them and who profits from it," she said. "The Legislature has that power. I intend to use it, not for you, but with you."

On energy costs, Uyterhoeven said she used a recent House floor session to expose how utility companies had secured fast-tracked infrastructure profits while $1 billion was cut from Mass Save, a program that helps households lower energy bills.

She filed an amendment requiring utilities to disclose executive compensation before raising residential rates. Only four of 160 House members stood in support.

"Corporations get handouts at the expense of working families," she said. "The growing affordability crisis is a product of the state Legislature prioritizing donors and companies over their constituents."

Uyterhoeven also identified municipal finance as a core Senate priority, describing towns like Winchester as caught in recurring budget cycles driven by the limits of Proposition 2½ — the state's property tax cap — while health insurance and education costs outpace local revenue growth.

She said she has worked on reforming the state's Chapter 70 school funding formula for nearly a decade, first as an advocate and then as a legislator, calling it a problem that local management alone cannot resolve.

Her broader legislative record in the House includes bills to protect public sector workers' right to strike, establish minimum pay for educators and restore voting rights for incarcerated people.

The daughter of immigrants raised by a single mother, Uyterhoeven said the decision to seek elected office came to her during President Donald Trump's first term. She said her political instincts were shaped by watching

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what she described as greedy investors target her mother's flight attendant union.

"I learned from a young age that workers, immigrants, and strong women like my mom, we aren't going to win by asking nicely," she said. "We need to organize to build a people-powered movement to take on big special interests, which is what we need to pass bold legislation in the State House."

The seat carries expectations set by Jehlen, whom Uyterhoeven praised in both her announcement and in an interview as a legislator who spoke out when others stayed silent and took on fights others refused.

"I have been inspired by Senator Jehlen's courage to fight for our values," Uyterhoeven said. "For 20 years, she has been the progressive heart of the Massachusetts Senate, the voice that said what needed to be said, fought the fights no one else would take, and won. That seat needs a leader who carries that same fire. That's the kind of senator I will be."

Uyterhoeven said she also plans to advance legislation she called the Protect Act, which she described as establishing guardrails around data privacy and restricting ICE access in locations including courts and schools — work she said reflects the kind of senator she intends to be ahead of the Sept. 1 primary.

Will Dowd is a Massachusetts journalist who covers municipal government and community life for Winchester News. He runs The Marblehead Independent, a reader-funded digital newsroom.

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Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

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2026 TOWN ELECTIONS

13 YEARS OF DATA, ONE SATURDAY: Takeaways from Winchester's override vote and the races that surrounded it

Winchester News reviewed precinct-level election results from every annual town election since 2014 — 13 years of data covering turnout, ballot questions, Select Board races, School Committee contests and Planning Board results — and compared them against the March 21 preliminary numbers. The 2026 results have not yet been certified by Town

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With override rejected, Winchester shifts from campaigning to budget planning

After Winchester voters rejected an $11.5 million Proposition 2 1/2 override on Election Day, March 21, the governing question in town has shifted from persuasion to arithmetic. Select Board member Bill McGonigle, who served on the Yes for Winchester campaign, said the defeat has changed how he approaches

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EVENTS

Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

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EVENTS

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

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